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NEW BOOKS REVIEWED

THE EVERLASTING MERCY, and THE WIDOW OF BYE STREET. By JOHN MASEFIELD. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1912.

THE two poems which make up this volume undoubtedly appeared at the psychological moment. One cannot think of any other moment in the whole history of English poetry when they would have been received as great poetry; yet when they appeared in the *English Review*, the calls for the issue which contained them multiplied considerably the circulation of that periodical.

It is the moment when the conscience of mankind is very highly socialized; it is alert and alive as never before to the sufferings of the unfortunate and downtrodden. The note struck in each poem is that of the poignant experience of the plain man, the stark, simple human soul. Looked at from the standpoint of mere technique, these long narratives have very little of what we are accustomed to look upon as poetry. If one takes the old definition, "simple, sensuous, passionate," the sensuous element is almost entirely lacking. There is very little imagery and no exaltation of language. If, as Shelley said, the function of poetry be to lift the veil from the hidden beauty of the world and make familiar objects look as though they were not familiar, then again John Masefield's work is not poetry. But if poetry may consist in feeling poignantly and imaginatively the simple sorrows of simple humanity and reproducing them with a minimum of embellishment, then one can account for the appeal of these two poems.

Here and there one comes upon bits of pure delight in nature such as might be a direct heritage from Chaucer:

"Out of a tuft a little lark
Went higher up than I could mark,
His little throat was all one thirst
To sing until his heart should burst,
To sing aloft in golden light
His song from blue air out of sight."

There is effective use of contrast in "The Everlasting Mercy," from the blasphemy of the first part to the sudden beautiful hymn of joy to Christ, beginning:

"O Christ, who holds the open gate,
O Christ, who drives the furrow straight,
O Christ the plow, O Christ the laughter,
Of holy, white birds flying after," etc.

As a sign of the times, a pointer to the direction which poetry is taking at the present moment, these two poems are very important.

LECTURES ON POETRY. By J. W. MACKAIL. New York: Longmans, Green & Company, 1911.

To those who knew Oxford in the eighties of the past century, J. W. Mackail's is a name to conjure with, for was he not one of the joint authors of that slim, anonymous, white volume entitled *Love-In-Idleness*? What a mine of poetry that was! The little volume was the very century bloom of minor poetry. It was a perfectly natural progression which seated the poet-fellow of Balliol in the chair of poetry. *The Springs of Helicon* contained a large portion of the lectures given during Mr. Mackail's tenure, and the present volume holds the remainder. These lectures are not so closely related as those of the previous volume, ranging as they do over so wide a field as "Virgil and Virgilianism," "Arabian Lyric Poetry," "Keats," "The Poetry of Oxford," and "The Progress of Poetry." Yet, as the author says, all the essays bear upon the interpretation of poetry in some of its forms; poetry as the controller of sullen care and frantic passion; as the companion in youth of desire and love; as the dispeller and solacer in age of the ills of life, labor, penury, pain, disease, sorrow, death itself; as the inspiration from youth to age, and, in all times and lands, of the noblest human motives and ardors, of glory, of generous shame, of freedom and the unconquerable mind.

Through the chapters of this noble book one finds scholarly care, exalted learning, the restrained emotion one is accustomed to look for in any work that bears the author's name. Just an instant's surprise strikes us, however—a sudden realization that the spirit of the times is neither here nor there, but penetrating the whole world, even that refuge of traditions, Oxford—when we hear him speak of the "socialized commonwealth, which as a dream or a vision mankind begin to have before their eyes," and we take heart of grace when this authority tells us that when the better world is realized we shall have in poetry "a nobler interpretation of an ampler life."

In the lecture on the poetry of Oxford, which takes account of the poetry of Grey, Arnold, Shelley, Keats, to say nothing of the more modern poetry of men like *Ionicus*, Canon Dixon, Dean Beeching, Bowyer Nicholls, Robert Bridges, St. John Lucas, he says: "No poetry in the future will be the poetry of Oxford in any full sense which does not take account of more than Oxford poetry has hitherto taken account of; which does not take account of those other lives whose destiny is included with ours, those without whom the readers could not read, nor the artists live. The seven seals of the book which this university bears on her arms have been one by one opened. At the opening of the last there is silence; but it is in that silence that the seven angels take their trumpets and prepare to sound."